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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: DEVELOPING A COMMERCIAL PLATFORM AT NON-FOREIGN
COMMERCIAL SERVICE POSTS

REF: STATE 174107

1. Post appreciates the efforts to better support non-FCS Commercial offices, and welcomes this review. Following are suggestions for consideration. Responses are keyed to the four main areas delineated in reftel.

2. Resource Allocation:

-- With limited resources, it makes sense to concentrate on posts with the greatest potential. Though, conceivably, each country has potential importers of US products, or government tenders attractive to US firms, there are not enough resources to support each equally. A regularly updated study of where the greatest potential return should be could help direct resources more rationally. Criteria for the study should take into consideration: interest by US investors/firms, range of potential projects, amount of reliable information generally available, stability of political situation. A minimum amount of support should be available to all posts, but resources above that minimum range would vary according to these factors.

-- Creative uses of resources should be encouraged, but guidance is needed. For example, can Post, with limited manpower resources, outsource a Company Profile to the local Dun & Bradstreet rep? Can Amcham be used to provide business support?

-- The current system for collecting and disbursing commercial fees at non-FCS posts is slow and cumbersome. Posts should be allowed to keep the funds, with regular reporting requirements.

-- Hard copies of some materials would still be helpful in lesser developed countries, and the move to electronic information with no more printed catalogs restricts access. Perhaps something for EB and Commerce to consider would be providing funding and layout content for local production, which might be cheaper and more targeted than mass distribution.

3. Program Integration with FCS:

-- Visits by experienced commercial officers to post would be helpful. It is not always possible to convey all necessary information by phone or email. A visit of a few days would allow discussions on more complex questions.

-- A commercial advocacy questions forum on-line, either as an IM program or one or two senior ECON/FCS officers per region, available on email to answer questions would provide a useful tool for officers in the field.

-- Econ Officers could accompany a delegation to a US trade show from a neighboring FCS country, with or without host country participants. If it is in an important sector, the information gathered could be brought back to Post for use with local firms.

-- Also, regularly updated information about delegations traveling from neighboring countries to US trade shows could help officers push for participation by local firms.

-- Each FSO and FSN should visit his or her partner post at least once. Partner posts should make available to the American business community information on constituent post opportunities (CCGs, updates, background, IMIs).

-- Integration with FCS information systems and databases would enhance both communication and reporting capabilities. Non-FCS posts could enter data on local firms and could access US company information. Cables are not useful vehicles for FCS and DoS does not have easy access to the DoC email directory. State officers cannot enter reports directly into the DoC system, and have to upload them, with difficulties caused by incompatible formats. (Note: The BFIF Instant Messaging System is helpful and welcome.)

-- FCS trade promotion efforts and training opportunities in partnerships posts (and regional centers) should include constituent posts.

14. Assessment of Business Priority Needs

-- Each non-FCS post can assess what the priority needs are, e.g., reliable market information, government advocacy, political/economic updates, information on US products. This profile can guide resource allocation, assistance, and training for employees.

-- A commercial mission statement, with a list of best practices and guidelines, particularly focusing on roles of Ambassador, DCM and sections would be helpful both for missions and for the US firms using commercial services.

15. Training Needs

-- Training for both FSOs and FSNs is critical to give baseline information to all staff. Resources are needed to send all FSOs, and FSNs, if possible, to training in the Dept. Regional training sessions may offer less expensive, more tailored options.

-- Commercial Tradecraft should address specific needs of post, utilizing the profile mentioned below above to inform and train individuals about the expectations at his or her Post.

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